СКАЗКИ

ЦАРЕВНА-ЛЯГУШКА

THE FROG PRINCESS

Рисунки
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Translated by Bernard Isaacs

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ЦАРЕВНА-ЛЯГУШКА.

THE FROG PRINCESS

In days gone by there was a Tsar who had three sons. When his sons came of age the Tsar called them to him and said: "My dear lads, I want you to get married, so that I may see your little ones, my grandchildren, before I die."

And his sons replied: "Very well, Father, give us your blessing. Who do you want us to marry?"

"Each of you must take an arrow, go out into the green field and shoot it. Where the arrows fall, there your destiny shall be."

So the sons bowed to their father, each of them took an arrow and went out into the green field, where they drew their bows and let fly their arrows.

The arrow of the eldest son fell in the courtyard of a nobleman, and the nobleman's daughter picked it up. The arrow of the middle son fell in the yard of a merchant, and the merchant's daughter picked it up.

But the arrow of the youngest son, Prince Ivan, flew up and away he knew not where. He walked on and on in search of it, and at last he came to a marsh, where what should he see but a Frog sitting on a leaf with the arrow in its mouth. Prince Ivan said to it:

"Frog, Frog, give me back my arrow."

And the Frog replied:

"Marry me!"

"How can I marry a Frog?"

"Marry me, for it is your destiny."

Prince Ivan was sadly disappointed, but what could he do? He picked up the Frog and brought it home. The Tsar celebrated three weddings: his eldest son was married to the nobleman's daughter, his middle son to the merchant's daughter, and poor Prince Ivan to the Frog.

One day the Tsar called his sons and said:

"I want to see which of your wives is most skilled with her needle. Let them each sew me a shirt by to-morrow morning."

The sons bowed to their father and went out.

Prince Ivan went home and sat down in a corner, looking very sad. The Frog hopped about on the floor and said to him:

"Why are you so sad, Prince Ivan? Are you in trouble?"

"My father wants you to sew him a shirt by to-morrow morning."

Said the Frog:

"Don't be downhearted, Prince Ivan. Go to bed; night is the mother of counsel."

So Prince Ivan went to bed, and the Frog hopped out on to the door-step, cast off her frog skin, and turned into Vasilisa the Wise, a maiden fair beyond compare.

She clapped her hands and cried:

"Maids and nurses, get ready, work steady! By to-morrow morning sew me a shirt like the one my own father used to wear!"

When Prince Ivan woke up next morning, the Frog was hopping about on the floor again, and on the table, wrapped up in a linen towel, the shirt lay. Prince Ivan was delighted. He picked up the shirt and took it to his father. He found the Tsar receiving gifts from his other sons. When the eldest laid out his shirt, the Tsar said:

"This shirt will do for one of my servants."

When the middle son laid out his shirt, the Tsar said:

"This one is only good for the bath-house."

Prince Ivan laid out his shirt, handsomely embroidered in gold and silver. The Tsar took one look at it and said:

"Now that is a shirt indeed! I shall wear it for best."

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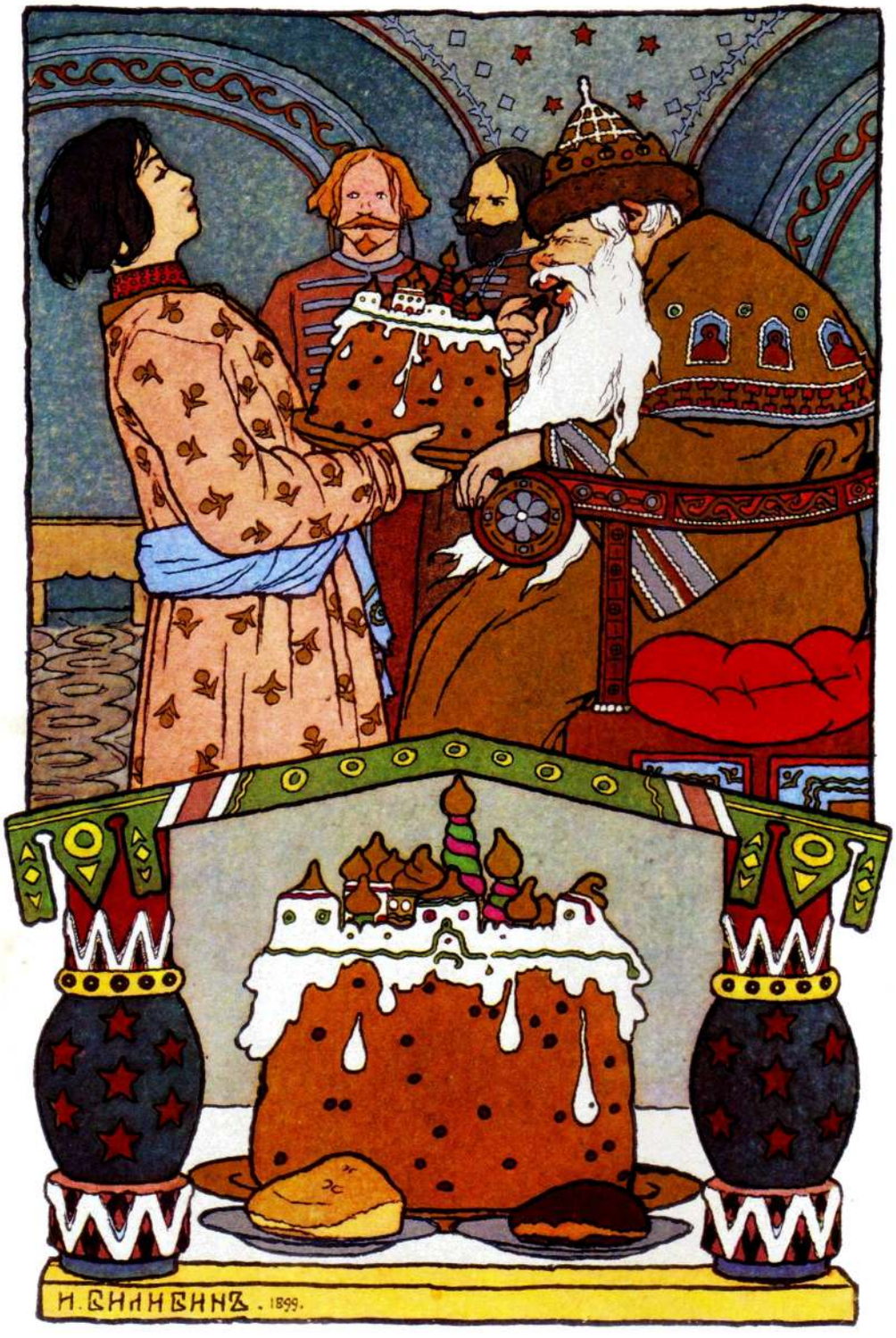


The two elder brothers went home and said to each other:

"It looks as though we had laughed at Prince Ivan's wife for nothing — it seems she is not a frog, but a sorceress."

Again the Tsar called his sons.

"Let your wives bake me bread by to-morrow morning," he said. "I want to know which one cooks the best."

Prince Ivan came home looking very sad again. The Frog said to him:

"Why are you so sad, Prince?"

"The Tsar wants you to bake bread for him by to-morrow morning," replied her husband.

"Don't be downhearted, Prince Ivan. Go to bed; night is the mother of counsel."

Now those other daughters-in-law had made fun of the Frog at first, but this time they sent an old henwife to see how the Frog baked her bread.

But the Frog was cunning and guessed what they were at. She kneaded the dough, broke the top of the stove and emptied the dough-trough straight down the hole. The old henwife ran back to the Tsar's daughters-in-law and told them all she had seen, and they did as the Frog had done.

Then the Frog hopped out on to the door-step, turned into Vasilisa the Wise, clapped her hands and cried:

"Maids and nurses, get ready, work steady! By to-morrow morning bake me a soft white loaf like the ones I ate when I lived home."

Prince Ivan woke up in the morning, and there on the table he saw a loaf of bread with all kinds of pretty designs on it. On the sides were quaint figures, on the top—royal cities with walls and gates.

Prince Ivan was ever so pleased. He wrapped the loaf up in a linen towel and took it to his father. Just then the Tsar was receiving loaves from his elder sons. Their wives had dropped the dough into the fire as the old henwife had told them, and it came out just a lump of charred dough. The Tsar took the loaf from his eldest son, looked at it, and sent it to the servants' hall. He took the loaf from his middle son and did the same with that. But when Prince Ivan handed him his loaf the Tsar said:

"Now that is what I call bread! It is fit to be eaten only on holidays."

And the Tsar bade his three sons come to his feast the next day and bring their wives with them.

Prince Ivan came home grieving again. The Frog hopped up and said:

"Croak, croak, why are you so sad, Prince Ivan? Has your father said anything unkind to you?"

"Froggy, my Frog, how can I help being sad? Father wants me to bring you to his feast, but how can you appear before people as my wife?"

"Don't be downhearted, Prince Ivan," said the Frog. "Go to the feast alone and I will come later. When you hear a knocking and a banging, do not be afraid. If you are asked, say it is only your Froggy riding in her box."

So Prince Ivan went by himself. His elder brothers drove up with their wives, rouged and powdered and dressed in fine clothes. They stood there and mocked at Prince Ivan.

"Why did you not bring your wife? You could have brought her in a handkerchief. Where, indeed, did you find such a beauty? You must have searched all the marshes for her."

The Tsar and his sons and daughters-in-law and all the guests sat down to feast at the oaken tables covered with handsome cloths. All at once there was a knocking and a banging that made the whole palace shake. The guests jumped up in fright, but Prince Ivan said:

"Do not be afraid, good folks, it is only my Froggy riding in her box."

A gilded carriage drawn by six white horses dashed up to the palace door and out of it stepped Vasilisa the Wise in a dress of sky-blue silk strewn with stars and with a shining moon upon her head—a maiden as fair as the sky at

И.БИЛИБИНЪ.

dawn, the fairest maiden ever born. She took Prince Ivan by the hand and led him to the oaken tables with the handsome cloths on them.

The guests began to eat, drink and make merry. Vasilisa the Wise drank from her glass and emptied the dregs into her left sleeve. Then she ate some swan meat and put the bones in her right sleeve.

The wives of the elder princes saw her do this and they did the same.

When the eating and drinking was over the time came for dancing. Vasilisa the Wise took Prince Ivan and tripped off with him. She whirled and danced, and everybody watched and marvelled. She waved her left sleeve, and lo!—a lake appeared. She waved her right sleeve, and white swans began to swim upon the lake. The Tsar and the guests were struck with wonder.

Then the other daughters-in-law went to dance. They waved one sleeve, but only splashed wine over the guests; they waved the other, but only scattered bones, and one bone hit the Tsar right in the eye. The Tsar flew into a rage and drove both daughters-in-law away.

Meanwhile, Prince Ivan slipped out and ran home. There he found the frog skin and threw it into the fire. When Vasilisa the Wise came home, she looked for

the frog skin but could not find it. She sat down on a bench sorely grieved and said to Prince Ivan:

"Ah, Prince Ivan, what have you done! Had you but waited three more days I would have been yours for ever. But now farewell. Seek me beyond the Thrice-Nine Lands, in the Thrice-Ten Kingdom, where Koshchei-the-Deathless dwells...".

So saying, Vasilisa the Wise turned herself into a grey cuckoo and flew out of the window. Prince Ivan wept long and hard, then bowed in all four directions and went forth he knew not where to seek his wife, Vasilisa the Wise. How long he walked it is hard to say, but his boots wore down at the heels, his *caftan* wore out at the elbows, and his cap became battered by the rain. By and by he met a little man, as old as old can be.

"Good day, my lad," said Little Old Man. "Where are you going, what is your errand?"

Prince Ivan told him about his trouble.

"Ah, why did you burn the frog skin, Prince Ivan?" said Little Old Man. "It was not yours to keep or do away with. Vasilisa the Wise was born wiser than her father, and that made him so angry that he turned her into a frog for

three years. Ah, well, it cannot be helped now. Take this ball of yarn and follow it without fear wherever it rolls."

Prince Ivan thanked Little Old Man and followed the ball of yarn. It rolled on and he came after. In an open field he met a Bear. Prince Ivan took aim and was about to kill it, but the Bear up and spoke in a human voice:

"Do not kill me, Prince Ivan, you may have need of me some day."

Prince Ivan spared the Bear's life and went on farther. Suddenly he saw a Drake flying overhead. He took aim, but the Drake said in a human voice:

"Do not kill me, Prince Ivan, you may have need of me some day."

He spared the Drake and went farther. A Hare came running by. Again Prince Ivan snatched his bow to shoot it, but the Hare said in a human voice:

"Do not kill me, Prince Ivan, you may have need of me some day."

So he spared the Hare and went on. He came to the blue sea and saw a Pike lying on the sandy beach gasping for breath.

"Ah, Prince Ivan," said the Pike, "take pity on me and throw me back into the blue sea!"

So he threw the Pike into the sea and walked on along the shore. By and by the ball of yarn rolled up to a forest, and there stood a little hut on hen's feet, turning round and round.

"Little hut, little hut, turn your back to the trees and your face to me, please."

The hut turned its face to him and its back to the trees. Prince Ivan walked in, and there, sitting in the chimney corner, was Baba-Yaga, the witch with a broom and a switch, a bony hag with a nose like a snag. When she saw him she said: "Ugh, ugh, Russian blood, never met by me before, now I smell it at my door. Who comes here? Where from? Where to?"

"You bad old baggage," retorted Prince Ivan. "You might give me meat and drink and steam me in the bath before asking questions."

So Baba-Yaga steamed him in the bath, gave him meat and drink and put him to bed, and then Prince Ivan told her he was seeking his wife, Vasilisa the Wise.

"I know, I know," said Baba-Yaga, "your wife is now in the power of Koshchei-the-Deathless. It will be hard to get her back. Koshchei is more than a match for you. His death is at the point of a needle, the needle is in an egg, the egg in a duck, the duck in a hare, the hare in a stone casket, the casket at the top of a tall oak-tree that Koshchei-the-Deathless guards as the apple of his eye."

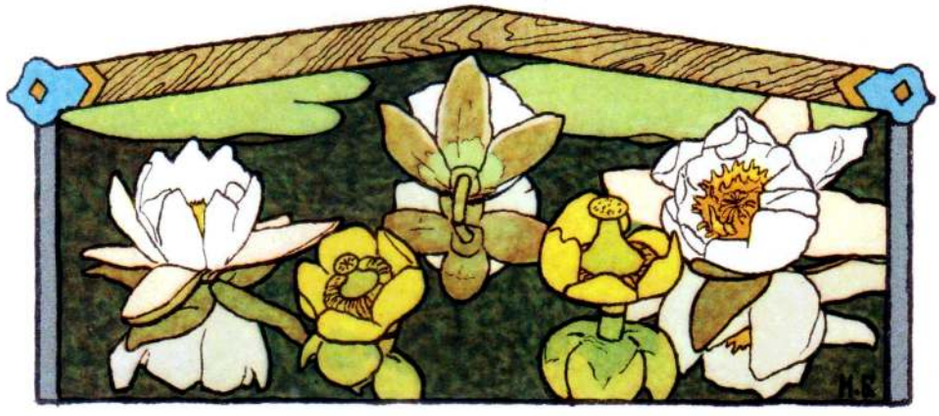
Prince Ivan spent the night at Baba-Yaga's, and in the morning she showed him the way to the tall oak. How long he walked it is hard to say, but by and by he came to the tall oak-tree with the stone casket at the top of it. But it was hard to reach.

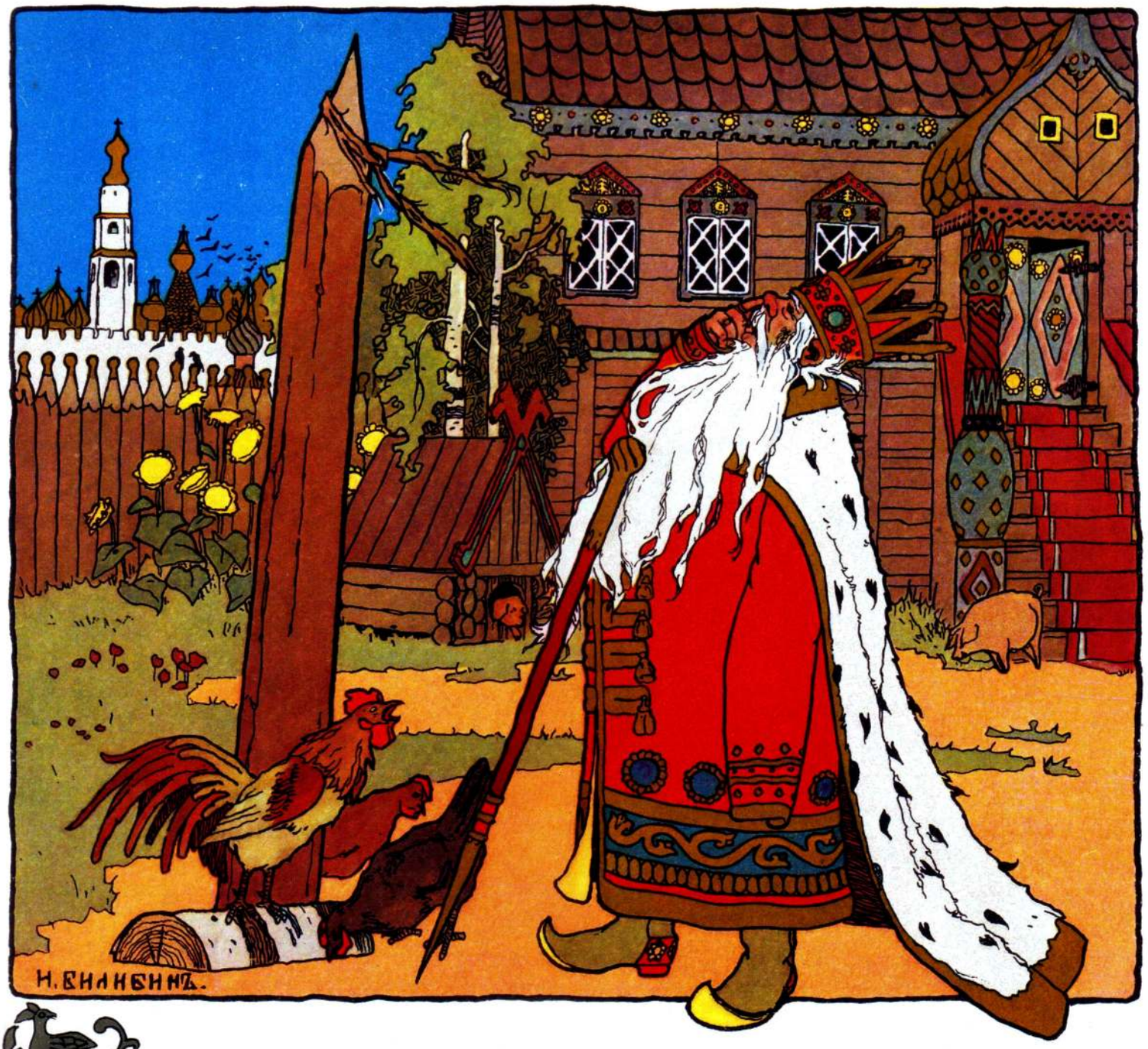
Suddenly up came the Bear and pulled the tree out, roots and all. Down fell the casket and broke open. Out of the casket sprang a hare and scampered off as

fast as it could. The other Hare gave chase, caught it and tore it to bits. Out of the hare flew a duck and shot high into the sky. And in a twinkling the Drake was at it and fetched it a blow. The duck dropped the egg, and down it fell into the blue sea.

At this Prince Ivan wept bitter tears. How could he find the egg in the sea? But all at once the Pike swam up with the egg in its mouth. Prince Ivan broke the egg, took the needle out and set about breaking the point off. The more he bent it, the more Koshchei-the-Deathless writhed and screamed, but all in vain. Prince Ivan broke off the point of the needle and Koshchei fell down dead.

Prince Ivan went to Koshchei's white stone palace. Vasilisa the Wise came running out to meet him and kissed him on his honey mouth. And Prince Ivan and Vasilisa the Wise went back to their own home and lived in peace and happiness to a ripe old age.



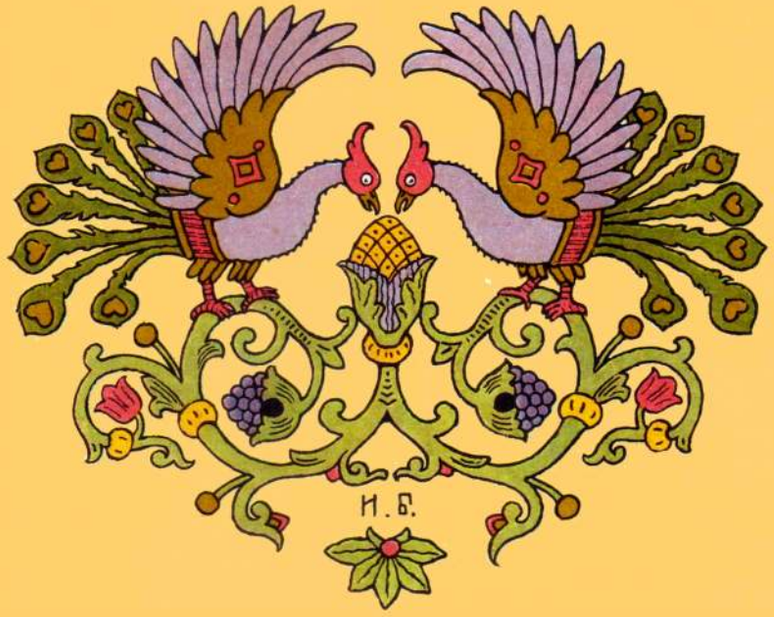


Жил-был царь,
There was a king,
У царя был двор,
He had a court,
На дворе был кол,
On the court a stake,
На колу мочало;
On the stake a skin,
Не начать-ли сказку сначала!
Let's once more begin.

И. Б. 1901

GOZNAK
MOSCOW
1979

ЦАРЕВНА-ЛЯГУШКА
Русская народная сказка
На английском языке
Printed in the USSR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